SCOTLAND

1750 - 1810

The Enlightenment

Exhibition

in the

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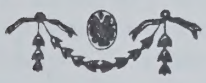

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Edinburgh is a hot-bed of genius.
Smollett, Humphry Clinker

When Smollett's Matthew Bramble visited Edinburgh about 1770, Scotland was in the midst of a cultural renaissance which was to make it famous around the world, to give a new direction to philosophy, and the sciences, to lay the foundation of the disciplines of economics and sociology, and through its poetry, to make a profound impact on the Romantic imagination. Yet when the eighteenth century began there was little to suggest that it would end with such distinction. The collapse of the Darien trading and colonization scheme in 1699 had brought the country close to bankruptcy. Partly because of the bitter lesson learned from this attempt to compete commercially with England, the Scottish parliament in 1707 voted to unite with that of its ancient enemy. Although the Treaty of Union received a majority vote in the Scottish parliament, it was widely unpopular throughout the country. A strong nationalist feeling was to appear in various guises throughout the century. It was an important element in the two Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. The fear of gradual cultural assimilation made the Scots re-examine their history and national institutions, which they had long taken for granted. Their traditional links with the Continent had to be adapted to a new British orientation.

Much of Scotland's intellectual life in this period centred in its universities. Most of its distinguished philosophers, scientists and historians were gifted teachers, attracting students from all parts of the country and beyond. The Universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen and St. Andrews each had outstanding professors, but it was at Edinburgh both in and outside the University that there was the greatest concentration of talent. At mid-century Edinburgh was still the Old Town, crowded, picturesque and dirty, all classes living together in six or seven-storey buildings of flats. Henry Grey Graham describes this society in his admirable study Scottish men of letters in the eighteenth century:

> The remarkable feature of literary society in Scotland in the second half of the century was the familiar fraternity in which these men lived. They all knew one another--most of them since boyhood, for they were all about the same age. They met one another almost every day of their lives; they belonged to the same set of society, sat at the same tables in the dingy old flats, copiously partaking of claret and punch without a headache, and of indigestible national dishes without a nightmare, with all the zest of epicures over the most delicious novelties. They could not go out of their wynds without being sure to see friends they had met last night at Mrs. Cockburn's merry parties, over a light tea and cakes; or at the Lord President's, over a heavy supper and drink.

Although the New Town, that elegant expression of 18th century town planning, was to separate the classes and to encourage the cult of gentility, Scots of this period still delighted in the "character," and memoirs of the period are full of anecdotes of wit and eccentricity.

Late 18th century Edinburgh society had its chronicler in the self-taught painter and engraver John Kay (1742-1828). Kay who had been a barber, gave up his trade on the encouragement of his friends and opened a small shop in Parliament Close where he sold his highly original caricatures of the small and great of Edinburgh. The black and white portraits in the exhibition are enlarged from the 1877 edition of his A series of original portraits and caricature etchings.

History & Antiquities (Cases 1 & 2)

Adam Ferguson, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1759 to 1785, may properly be considered the first sociologist. Alone among the Edinburgh literati, he was a Highlander, and it is interesting to speculate what this knowledge of another more primitive society may have added to his Essay on the history of civil society (1767). In this study of the development of human society from rudeness to refinement, Ferguson was trying to establish a criterion for civilization. Progress and the increasing complexity of the modern state militate against individual involvement; in demonstrating this process in society Ferguson anticipated the modern concept of alienation.

Pre-eminent among 18th century Scottish historians was William Robertson, Historiographer of Scotland and for thirty years Principal of Edinburgh University. In 1759 he published his History of Scotland during the reigns of Queen Mary and of James VI. It was an immediate success, and the first edition was sold out in a month. Particularly admired was its style; Horace Walpole expresses his surprise that a man "whose dialect I scarce understood" could write the best modern history in "the purest English."

David Hume is best known as a philosopher, but he is also remembered for several works of history written during his term as Librarian of the Advocates' Library when he had access to research material. In his History of England (1762) he, like Robertson, accepted the traditional view that Mary Queen of Scots was an accomplice in the death of her husband Lord Darnley. This judgment and the authenticity of the "Casket Letters" on which it was based were first seriously challenged by Walter Goodall, the editor and translator of John of Fordun's Scotichronicon and Hume's assistant at the Advocates' Library, in An examination of the letters said to be written by Mary Queen of Scots to James, Earl of Bothwell (1754). While Hume delighted in teasing his fiery and erratic assistant about the maligned queen, he resented the bitter personal attacks of another of Mary's apologists, William Tytler, in his Historical and critical enquiry into the evidence produced by the Earls of Murray and Morton, against Mary Queen of Scots (1760).

A number of Scottish judges of this period were also historians, philosophers and literary critics. Henry Home, Lord Kames wrote on many

subjects, including agriculture (see Case 6). His Sketches of the history of man (1774) was intended to be a popular work; for the benefit of the female sex he translated the quotations in foreign languages. Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes also wrote on Scottish law and antiquities. His most important work was his two volume Annals of Scotland (1776-79) a plain, factual chronology which Dr. Johnson admired more than the "painted histories" of Robertson and Gibbon.

More specialized studies also attracted the attention of historical writers of the period. Among many genealogical works, The Peerage of Scotland, compiled by Sir Robert Douglas in consultation with the living representatives of each family, is still a classic in its field. The history of Edinburgh (1787) written by the bookseller Alexander Kincaid was one of many local histories. Published just twenty years after the beginning of the New Town, it shows the rapid development of the city northward in the late eighteenth century.

The most famous antiquarian at work in Scotland was the Englishman Francis Grose, described as "a cheerful-looking grig of an old fat fellow, the precise figure of Dr. Slop," by Burns who met him at the house of his patron Robert Riddel. Burns persuaded Grose to include Alloway Kirk in his work and agreed to provide him with "a witch tale" to accompany the plate. The result was the celebrated "Tam o' Shanter," published for the first time in book form in Grose's Antiquities of Scotland (1789-91), and for his fellow countrymen a warning about all such social historians:

Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,
Frae Maidenkirk to Johnny Groat's---
If there's a hole in a' your coats,
    I rede you tent it:
A chield's amang you takin' notes,
    And faith he'll prent it!

Language & Literature -- Scots (Case 3)

In 1706 the printer James Watson brought out the first volume of A choice collection of comic and serious Scots poems, both ancient and modern. This publication was a frankly nationalistic gesture against the Union. It began a remarkable revival of Scots vernacular poetry, and was followed by Allan Ramsay's The ever green, being a collection of Scots poems, wrote by the ingenious before 1600 (1724) and by many other popular collections of poems, songs and ballads. The vernacular tradition also produced two remarkable poets whose public reception was widely different.

Robert Fergusson, who died at the tragically early age of 24, used traditional forms and colloquial speech in witty and perceptive descriptions of Edinburgh life, particularly its less respectable aspects.

In his lifetime he was almost completely ignored, but he was a major inspiration for another poet, Robert Burns, whose first appearance in print in 1786 made him, in his own words, "the wonder of all the gay world."

Burns was twenty-seven and planning to emigrate to the West Indies when his Poems, chiefly in the Scottish dialect was published in Kilmarnock. In December 1786 Henry Mackenzie, author of The Man of Feeling and a leading literary critic, published an enthusiastic review in his paper The Lounger. Mackenzie however praised Burns for all the wrong reasons. Scots-speaking critics had come to think of English as the only proper language of literature. Burns was advised to write in English, and to stay away from satirical attacks on the Church like "The Holy Fair."

At the same time as Fergusson and Burns were writing in the colourful language and the traditions of older Scots poetry, many Scots were trying to rid themselves of their Scottish speech. James Beattie, a professor of philosophy at Aberdeen and the author of several volumes of poetry including The Minstrel, published his Scoticisms . . . designed to correct impropriieties of speech and writing just a year after the first appearance of Burns' poetry. Others who wrote guides to "Scoticisms" include the philosopher David Hume and the agriculturalist Sir John Sinclair.

Of more lasting significance was the work of John Jamieson whose Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language (1808) has remained unsurpassed until the appearance of the Scottish National Dictionary in this century. Scott, who met him when he was selling part of a collection of coins in order to buy books for his dictionary, described him in a letter--"a man of Letters an author and a poet, an admirer of antiquities and a remarkably fortunate collector of coins ... And withal this medallist and antiquarian is an Antiburgher Seceding Clergyman and does all these things not to mention the trifling expense attending the maintenance of a wife and only twelve children upon a princely salary of £60 a year, as well paid as such stipends generally are."

Sir Walter Scott was an advocate who had published two minor works of poetry translated from the German when his Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border appeared in 1802. Scott was familiar with the Border ballads from his childhood, and their legendary lore was to provide him a lifetime of material for novels and poems. His next published work was The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805), the first of those long narrative poems which was to make him famous across Europe and to contribute so much to the development of the Romantic movement.

In 1802 a group of young men, Francis Jeffrey, Francis Horner, Henry Brougham, Sidney Smith, began a periodical for which no one, including themselves, predicted a long life. It was the Edinburgh Review, and not only did it last for nearly one hundred and thirty years, but it set the standard for serious book reviewing throughout the nineteenth century. The first volume includes an enthusiastic review of Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border written by the antiquarian John Stoddart.

Language & Literature -- Gaelic (Case 4)

Another writer who was to have a profound effect on the Romantic movement was James Macpherson. When Macpherson published his Fragments of ancient poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Galic or Erse language in 1760, the Highlands of Scotland were almost as unknown to the rest of Europe as the continent of Africa. The Fragments were followed by Fingal in 1762 and Temora in 1763, both, it was claimed, composed by the ancient bard Ossian son of Fingal. On a generation conditioned to the ideas of Rousseau, the "return to nature," the "noble savage," the cult of sensibility, these poems produced a sensation. They translated into a dozen languages; they were compared with Homer, portrayer of another heroic society. Napoleon is said to have carried the poems of Ossian about with him wherever he went.

Meanwhile a controversy about the authenticity of the poetry raged in Britain. Books and pamphlets appeared for and against Macpherson. So little was known about Gaelic literature outside the Gaelic-speaking world that much of the commentary was pure speculation based on literary theory, while Highlanders appealed to about their knowledge of Ossianic literature felt their national honour was in question. Hugh Blair, the popular preacher of St. Giles' Church and Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, defended Macpherson's work. William Shaw, author of An analysis of the Galic Language (1778) and of a Gaelic-English dictionary, was critical. A committee of the Highland Society of Scotland examined the question in detail and published its Report in 1805.

While Macpherson's Ossianic poetry is now seen to be largely his own work, it had important consequences both for the Romantic movement and for Gaelic Scotland. It attracted many notable visitors to Scotland to observe Highland life and scenery. It also stimulated the collection and preservation of much Gaelic poetry still remaining in manuscript and oral tradition which would otherwise have been lost.

Philosophy (Case 5)

The study of philosophy, one of the principal products of the Enlightenment, begins early in the century with the work of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746). Hutcheson was appointed to the chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow in 1730. Although he developed no philosophic system of his own, he was a gifted teacher who had profound influence on his students. Central to his teaching, first expressed in his Inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue (1725), was his belief in Benevolence, "all the kind affections which incline us to make others happy, and all the actions which flow from such affections."

The writings of Hutcheson had a strong influence on the greatest of 18th century Scottish philosophers, David Hume (1711-1776). Hume's first

work, to which he devoted ten years of study, A treatise of human nature (1739-40), has been called "the most important philosophical treatise of the century." In it he applied the experimental method of Newton to the study of man's psychological and moral behaviour. Hume was conscious of the pioneer nature of his work, and gave it a dramatic quality by portraying himself in the act of discovery, exaltation alternating with misgiving.

Although many in Scotland expressed horror at Hume's agnosticism few could resist the personal charm of this rotund, genial man who looked "more like a turtle-eating alderman than a refined philosopher." He loved to debate philosophy with friends who held opposing views, even when he did not have the last word. After an evening spent with the Tron Church minister John Jardine, Hume set out for home, declining the offer of a light. When Jardine heard him stumble on the turnpike stair, he could not resist calling out, "Davie, I have often tell't ye that 'natural licht' is no sufficient."

Other philosphers were not so inclined to joke with Hume. The subsequent development of Scottish philosophy is in large part a vigorous reaction against Hume's ideas, although many of his critics were more influenced by his ideas than they realized. James Beattie's Essay on the nature and immutability of truth, in opposition to sophistry and scepticism was a particularly violent defense of Christianity which Hume described as "a horrible large lie in octavo." In the House of Commons, however, relief was expressed that "the Scots were not all freethinkers."

A more reasoned reply to Hume was Thomas Reid's Inquiry into the human mind, on the principles of common sense (1764 and 1765), a work which gave the name "common sense school" to Scottish philosophy. It was the system of Reid, further developed by Dugald Stewart, which formed the basis of philosophical study in both France and America throughout the nineteenth century. Like Hutcheson, Stewart was a great teacher, who wrote and lectured with style. His pupils included many notable men of the next generation, Henry Brougham, Francis Jeffrey, Lord John Russell and others. From Dugald Stewart they learned the application of ethics to political life. Stewart also edited the works of his predecessors and wrote their memoirs, among them the Essays on philosophical subjects (1795) of Adam Smith, better known as an economist.

Economics - Theory & Practice (Case 6)

Adam Smith's Inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations (1776) has long been recognized as the foundation of modern economics. But John Kenneth Galbraith has pointed out in a recent appreciation that it is also remarkable for its style, lucid, witty and full of pithy aphorisms. For example, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or

the baker that we expect our dinner but from their regard to their self-interest." Clearsighted and pragmatic, Adam Smith might still serve as a valuable example to the modern economist.

While Adam Smith was concerned with the origins of wealth on a national scale, many in the eighteenth century Scotland were attempting to improve the smaller world of their own estates. Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835) at the age of sixteen inherited extensive property in Caithness, and began at once to improve it with the energy and enthusiasm which characterized all his actions throughout a long life. He did not hesitate to write on any subject that interested him, even producing a dissertation on the authenticity of Macpherson's Ossian. However, his principal concern was with the agriculture and fisheries of Scotland. In 1790 while a lay member of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, he conceived the idea of asking every parish minister to compile a detailed description of his parish. The result, published in 21 volumes between 1791 and 1799 as The statistical account of Scotland, was the first comprehensive survey of a whole country, and introduced the words "statistics" and "statistical" (in the sense, "useful to the state") into the English language. Sinclair was the founder and first president of the Board of Agriculture, and his other important survey was done for this body. It is the five volume General report of the agricultural state and political circumstance of Scotland (1814), based on reports prepared by the Board's representatives in each county.

The economist and writer, James Anderson (1739-1808) also did much to improve agriculture in Scotland. He is particularly remembered for his introduction of the "Scotch plough," a much lighter implement than the one previously in use. From 1790 to 1794 he ran a weekly paper The Bee, but later retired to the country to devote his time to agricultural experiments and to writing on many practical subjects. Lord Kames, the judge, historian and antiquarian, was also intensely interested in agriculture. At the age of eighty he published his Gentlemen farmer, recording a lifetime of experience managing his own estate.

One of Sir John Sinclair's frequent correspondents was George Dempster, who owned the estate of Skibo in Sutherland. He, like Sinclair was a member of Parliament for many years, but in 1790, he retired to devote his attention to agriculture and fisheries. He was particularly concerned about the massive emigration from the Highlands, and the broadside advertising "waste land" was an attempt to attract settlers to his estate. It is from a collection of letter books put together by his great-nephew and now in the Fisher Rare Book Library.

Science & Medicine (Case 7)

The outstanding teacher in medicine in 18th century Scotland, whose medical schools had already gained an international reputation, was William Cullen (1710-1790). Cullen was instrumental in the founding of the Glasgow

Medical School and held successively the chairs of medicine in Glasgow, and chemistry and medicine in Edinburgh. He was the first to lecture in the vernacular rather than Latin, and from 1757 gave clinical lectures in the Edinburgh Infirmary, a practice almost unknown at the time.

Among Cullen's pupils was the chemist Joseph Black (1728-1799), who first studied medicine in Glasgow. Cullen early recognized his ability and made him his assistant. Black's thesis on "magnesia alba, quicklime and some other alkaline substances" laid the foundations of quantitative analysis. His work on the evaporation of water begun in 1756 was to provide the basis of the more famous experiments of his pupil James Watt. His lectures first at Glasgow and later at Edinburgh were extremely popular. They were reconstructed and published after his death by John Robison using Black's notes and the notes of some of his students.

The Royal Edinburgh Infirmary, at which many distinguished doctors were to study and teach, was begun as a small dispensary in a private house in 1729. In 1736 it received a royal charter, and two years later a handsome building designed by William Adam was begun. In the nineteenth century it was to be the setting for the first use of chloroform as an anesthetic by James Simpson and Joseph Lister's first experiments in antiseptics.

James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714-1799), judge, philosopher, and classicist, is a difficult man to classify. Frequently remembered as an eccentric who believed that some men were still born with tails, he was in his own day admired for his courtly manners and for the fine hospitality of his suppers. His principal work is the six-volume Of the origin and progress of language (1773-76), a learned treatise which traces the development of man from a primitive state where he lived without speech or reason like the animals to the high point of civilization in classical Greece. In a remarkable way Monboddo anticipated the ideas of Darwin in the following century.

The Arts (Case 8)

Versatility and practicality were the hallmarks of the Scottish Enlightenment, and nowhere are they more evident than in its scholar-printers. William Smellie (1740-1795) was apprenticed at twelve to a firm of printers. Within four years he was appointed corrector of the press and allowed to attend classes at the University, and at seventeen he won his employers a silver medal for the most accurate edition of a Latin classic. At the end of his apprenticeship he went into business on his own, forming partnerships at various times with Balfour, Auld and Creech. (Examples of his work can be seen throughout the exhibition, including the handsome history of the Royal Infirmary shown in the previous case.) Meanwhile he had taken up the study of botany, and even lectured

in place of his professor John Hope. He also translated the work of the French naturalist Buffon; his Philosophy of Natural History (see case 7) was suggested by his study of Buffon. He was the editor and chief writer of, perhaps, the most famous product of the Scottish Enlightenment, the first edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica published in 1771. The plates for this work were engraved by Andrew Bell, who can be seen talking to Smellie in Kay's engraving.

The finest examples of printing in this period came from the press of the brothers Robert and Andrew Foulis, printers to the University of Glasgow from 1743, and organizers of the Foulis Academy, the first art school in Britain. Their imprints are admired for their accuracy, their fine typography and their simple elegance of design. They produced over 500 books ranging from the Greek classics to modern Scottish poets like Ramsay and Beattie. Their finest work is considered to be the Homer published in four folio volumes between 1756 and 1758. The Greek type used for this work was designed and cast by Alexander Wilson (1714-1786) another remarkably versatile man. While working as an assistant to a London surgeon, he became interested in typefounding by accident, and returned to Scotland to establish a foundry. While continuing to operate this business, Wilson in 1760 began a new career when he became the first professor of practical astronomy at Glasgow University. In this field he is remembered for an important discovery about the nature of sun spots.

Bookbinding in Scotland in the eighteenth century is distinguished by several distinctive styles. The "wheel binding" with its radiating spokes built up from many separate tools is similar to earlier "fan bindings" which were popular in Europe. The "herringbone binding" owes its name to the central spine with ribs which forms the basis of its design. The most original designs were the work of the binder James Scott about whom very little is known. He was influenced by the architecture of the period, and his designs frequently include columns and arches. These more elaborate binding styles generally appear on Bibles and on academic theses, plain brown calf being preferred for history and philosophy.

In 1767 the Town Council of Edinburgh at the urging of the Lord Provost George Drummond approved a plan for a "new town" drawn up by James Craig. It was a formal scheme of parallel streets, balanced at each end by a square, and looking out on both sides to gardens. Admirably suited to its location on a ridge north of the Old Town, it expresses the 18th century belief in the harmony of man and nature. Scotland was fortunate at this time of expansion to produce a remarkable family of architects. They were the Adam brothers, sons of William Adam who had designed the Royal Infirmary and other important buildings. Most celebrated of the brothers was Robert Adam; among his designs in the New Town of Edinburgh, are the Register House and the façade for a privately-built row of houses in Charlotte Square.

In 1767 Adam Ferguson in his Essay on the history of civil society looked to the past for a definition of civilization. In the same year the architect James Craig visualized the ideal city of the future, a city which

would embody the ideals of the Enlightenment, reason, order, and freedom. His printed plan contains these lines from the poem "Liberty" by James Thomson:

> August around what Public Works I see!
> Lo! stately Streets, lo! Squares that court the breeze ...
> See! long Canals, and deepened Rivers join
> Each part with each, and with the circling Main
> The whole enlivened Isle.